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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of fifteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 11 May 2017 from the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations has the honour to state that the Government of Pakistan has decided to present its candidature for membership in the Human Rights Council for the period 2018-2020, at elections to be held in 2017 in New York.

Pakistan is strongly committed to the promotion and principle of the protection of human rights. In pursuance of its deep respect for human rights, and on the basis of the rich experience and expertise acquired from its association with the Human Rights Council, Pakistan looks forward to contributing further by engaging proactively with the Council, its entire machinery, processes and initiatives, as well as with the members of the international community, United Nations agencies and members of civil society.

The Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations would be grateful if the present note verbale and its annex, setting out the candidacy of Pakistan and the written pledges and commitments of Pakistan for the promotion and protection of human rights in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, could be included in the final document to be produced for the forthcoming elections and be circulated among Member States.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 11 May 2017 from the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Pakistan to the Human Rights Council, 2018-2020

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. Pakistan is honoured to present its candidature for membership to the Human Rights Council for the term 2018-2020, for which elections will be held in October 2017, during the seventy-second session of the General Assembly in New York. Deeply committed to the cause of universal human rights, Pakistan looks forward to the continued support, confidence and trust of the international community in its endeavour to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide, including through the work of the Human Rights Council.

2. Pakistan is a founding member of the Human Rights Council and previously served on it from 2006 to 2011 and from 2013 to 2015. Through its presence in the Council, Pakistan would endeavour to further its contribution to the collective efforts to help consolidate the global human rights agenda and to advance the promotion and protection of human rights at the national and international levels.

3. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251, following is a brief account of Pakistan's contribution, voluntary pledges and commitments in the field of human rights.

Contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights and progress on past pledges

4. Pakistan's commitment to human rights emanates in the first place from its Constitution and duty towards its people. We are determined to ensure that every Pakistani citizen lives in equality, dignity and freedom, with complete protection of fundamental human rights without any discrimination. The words of the founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, are the guiding principle of our policy: "We are equal citizens of one State".

5. Human rights serve as the foundation for a harmonious and progressive society. Pakistan attaches high priority to advancing the mutually reinforcing objectives of development, human rights and democracy. Accordingly, there is a strong and unequivocal political commitment in this regard. We have made considerable progress in the field of human rights despite challenges ranging from terrorism to resource constraints. Pakistan remains committed to the promotion and protection of human rights through efforts at the domestic level and through international cooperation and engagement. In pursuance of its deep respect for human rights principles and norms and on the basis of the experience and expertise acquired from its membership in the Council, Pakistan looks forward to contributing further by engaging proactively with the Human Rights Council, its machinery, processes and initiatives, as well as with the members of the international community, United Nations agencies and members of civil society.

National action plan for human rights

6. In fulfilment of its voluntary pledges, universal periodic review recommendations, and unflinching resolve and commitment to further promote human rights in the country, the Government of Pakistan adopted a National Action Plan for Human Rights on 13 February 2016. The Action Plan consists of six broad

areas of intervention: (a) policy and legal reforms; (b) implementation of key human rights priorities; (c) cross-cutting interventions for the protection of human rights; (d) international/United Nations treaty implementation; (e) institutional interventions; and (f) an implementation and monitoring mechanism for the Action Plan. It includes a time frame for implementation of the priority areas with 16 expected outcomes and 60 actions for the protection and promotion of human rights in Pakistan.

7. The Action Plan envisages activities at both the federal and provincial levels in collaboration with federal ministries and provincial departments. An amount of 750 million Pakistan rupees has been allocated to support implementation of the action plan, which includes 400 million Pakistan rupees for human rights education, sensitization, awareness-raising, research and communication; 250 million Pakistan rupees for the establishment of a human rights institute; and an endowment fund of 100 million Pakistan rupees for providing free legal assistance to victims of human rights violations who are poor. A national task force under the chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Human Rights, with the representation of federal ministries and provincial law/human rights departments, is overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan. Committees have also been formulated at the district level to monitor and promote human rights at the grass-roots level. In addition, Pakistan's Parliament has had the unique distinction of setting up the world's first Sustainable Development Goals implementation unit (with its secretariat based in the Parliament), which has a particular focus on the implementation of goals and targets relating to human rights.

Ratification and implementation of international conventions

8. Pakistan has ratified and continues to implement seven core international human rights treaties and two optional protocols. Pakistan ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in November 2016. We are focused on the implementation of these instruments at all levels. To achieve this objective, the Government has established treaty implementation cells at the federal and provincial levels to oversee compliance with these international instruments. A module for the capacity-building of officials of the federal and provincial governments about ratified human rights conventions has been prepared and is being implemented.

9. Pakistan continues to regularly report to the relevant treaty bodies on the implementation of these conventions. Pakistan's fifth periodic report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its combined twenty-first to twenty-third periodic report on the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination were reviewed in May and August 2016, respectively. The initial report on the implementation of the Convention against Torture was reviewed in April 2017. Initial reports on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights will also be reviewed in 2017, along with the review of the third national report under the universal periodic review.

National human rights institutions

10. In accordance with the Paris Principles, Pakistan has established a National Commission for Human Rights. Functional since May 2015, the Commission has a wide-ranging mandate encompassing all aspects of human rights, including dealing with the rights of women, children and other vulnerable segments of the society and jurisdiction to take up any complaint regarding human rights violations. The

establishment of the Commission is a significant step that will further contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights in Pakistan.

11. The National Commission on the Status of Women has been strengthened. Under a new team, the Commission is being reinvigorated with a number of initiatives for the empowerment of women and the protection of their rights.

12. Another landmark achievement in the field of human rights is the strengthening of the National Commission on Minorities and the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances. Currently, the Parliament is considering a bill to establish an independent national commission for the rights of children.

13. In line with our obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities is being strengthened, and policy measures and laws are being introduced to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. In addition, a national committee representing relevant government departments, United Nations agencies and disabled persons organizations has been constituted under the chairmanship of the Minister for Human Rights for implementation of the Convention and other international commitments pertaining to disability.

Legislative and policy measures

14. Significant legislative reforms have been undertaken in recent years. Laws introducing new legislation or addressing gaps in existing legislation have been passed by the Parliament. Most prominent in this regard is pro-women legislation, including anti-rape and anti-honour killing laws and laws relating to forced marriages, workplace harassment and the prevention of criminal incidents involving acid.

15. A number of affirmative measures have been in place, including the reservation of seats for women in the National Assembly and the Senate as well as in the provincial assemblies; the establishment of the Women Parliamentary Caucus; the reservation of seats for women at the three tiers of local bodies, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action; and the reservation of 10 per cent of seats for women in the civil services. All of these policy measures contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 5, which is related to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

16. In addition to a number of laws relating to the rights of children, which are being considered by the Parliament, laws have been passed to prohibit violence and abuse against children and to increase the age of criminal responsibility, as well as a review of the juvenile justice system. A number of laws and administrative measures to safeguard the rights of minorities are being considered, including the Protection of Minorities Bill; the Christian and Hindu Marriages Bill; the establishment of a special police force to provide security for places of worship of minorities; and measures to prevent the misuse and abuse of blasphemy laws.

17. Given the importance it attaches to the right to development, the Government has taken steps to mainstream human rights in the development sector. The integration of human rights in the Vision 2025 plan is a clear manifestation of this priority. In order to promote international cooperation for the realization of the right to development, numerous projects are being undertaken under the China-Pakistan economic corridor and other bilateral cooperation arrangements.

18. At the international level, we continue to constructively engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms. Pakistan is also working closely with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The following visited Pakistan: the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, from 19 to 29 May

2012; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, from 10 to 12 September 2012; and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, from 11 to 13 March 2013. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also visited Pakistan, from 4 to 8 June 2012. These visits have been useful for us in terms of feedback and are reflective of our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. These visits were part of our efforts to enhance our cooperation in the field of human rights with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We continue to interact with human rights mechanisms in Geneva.

Voluntary pledges and commitments

At the national level

19. In order to further consolidate the progress made during recent years as well as to overcome challenges, Pakistan will take bold measures, with regard to both policy and legal reforms and where necessary, by undertaking effective enforcement of its existing legislation and policy on human rights. Overall, we will further strengthen the holistic approach to human rights with a primary focus of future interventions for women, children, minorities, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable segments of society. We therefore pledge to undertake the utmost effort in this regard, including by considering the following:

(a) Implement the National Action Plan for human rights, which besides setting our strategic direction and key priorities, is aligning our interventions with our national and international obligations;

(b) Formulate a mechanism to identify gaps in existing legislation, propose new legislation and review the enforcement of existing legislation, in consultation with provincial governments and other relevant stakeholders including civil society;

(c) Further enhance the operational effectiveness of national human rights institutions in accordance with their mandates through the provision of adequate human and financial resources;

(d) Enhance the capacity-building of government officials and other relevant stakeholders, including the treaty implementation cells, regarding core human rights conventions ratified by the Government;

(e) Continue to ensure speedy justice for victims of human rights violations, including through the strengthening of human and technical resources available to law enforcement agencies and prosecutors;

(f) Create awareness through media campaigns, seminars and workshops, and through the introduction of human rights education in academic and training institutions;

(g) Establish more crisis centres for women, strengthen and standardize existing centres/services in collaboration with civil society organizations in order to provide rehabilitation services for victims and survivors of violence, and strengthen women police stations;

(h) Safeguard the rights of children by establishing a national commission for the rights of children, and strengthen the National Council for the Persons with Disabilities;

(i) Protect the rights of minorities and promote interfaith harmony through various policy and legislative measures;

(j) Expand the scope of toll-free help lines in all provinces to receive complaints and provide information as well as link complaints to relevant institutions, including offices of the ombudsperson;

(k) Effectively utilize the fund for free legal aid to the victims of human rights violations;

(l) Mainstream human rights in development planning by incorporating cross-cutting issues of health, education and social services under Vision 2025 at the federal and provincial levels. Make efforts to allocate adequate resources for the promotion and protection of human rights and gender mainstreaming in the public sector development programme.

At the international level

20. Pakistan greatly values international cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights treaties and declarations. In this spirit, Pakistan will continue and further strengthen its contribution towards the global promotion of human rights and its positive engagement with the Human Rights Council on the following:

(a) As one of its founding members, Pakistan will continue to strive to make the Human Rights Council a forum for genuine dialogue and cooperation on the basis of the principles of non-discrimination and impartiality, as reflected in Council resolution 5/1 on institution-building of the Council;

(b) Pakistan actively participated in the establishment of various mechanisms of the Council and its review in 2011. We would continue to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the methods of work of the Council and its various mechanisms;

(c) We would continue to play an active role in the Council with a view to strengthening the Council to promote dialogue, cooperation, capacity-building and technical assistance for the protection and promotion of human rights with due regard to the historic, cultural and religious values of member States and their specific socioeconomic conditions;

(d) We would continue to promote constructive engagement, dialogue and cooperation with the concerned States in addressing "situations of concern" in the Human Rights Council;

(e) We consider the universal periodic review to be a unique cooperative mechanism for identifying human rights challenges and making tangible recommendations in a non-politicized manner. Pakistan constructively participated in its second universal periodic review, held in October 2012. We would continue to make efforts to further strengthen our own participation during the review of our third report on the universal periodic review in November 2017, as well as engage with the universal periodic review mechanism during its third cycle by making action-oriented and useful recommendations to other member States;

(f) Pakistan has had the honour to serve as the Coordinator of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Group on Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva for the past many years. Pakistan has endeavoured to build bridges and help to overcome the divergences and misunderstandings that have at times appeared in the approach of the Islamic world and the west regarding some issues. To this end, Pakistan has been a part of all major initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue and harmony among all societies and cultures and has sponsored resolutions in the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council to

promote interreligious and intercultural cooperation for peace. This includes Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief; and the General Assembly resolution on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, which was jointly sponsored by the Philippines and Pakistan. We pledge that we will continue to work with all Member States to maintain and strengthen consensus on these issues;

(g) Pakistan has been supportive of the role and activities of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations for promoting a culture of dialogue, tolerance and cooperation among the nations of the world. We will continue to support this initiative;

(h) Both as OIC Coordinator and in its national capacity, Pakistan has maintained strong liaison and coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in its endeavour to promote and advance the human rights agenda. We pledge to provide further support to the Office in carrying out its mandate;

(i) Pakistan would continue to submit all periodic reports to treaty bodies in compliance with its treaty obligations and constructively participate during the reviews;

(j) We would continue to strengthen cooperation and engagement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the special procedures. We have also decided to extend invitations to the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and to the Special Rapporteur on the right to food to visit Pakistan on mutually convenient dates.

21. As a democratic and progressive State, Pakistan is firmly resolved to uphold, promote and safeguard universal human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. This is manifest in the high-level political commitment and the policies and programmes of the Government on human rights, and Pakistan's longstanding and continued desire and readiness to work with the international community to strengthen multilateral cooperation and mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights. Pakistan considers the opportunity to serve in the Human Rights Council as a means to advance these objectives and would deeply appreciate the confidence and backing of the Member States.